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ABSTRACT

Many teachers hesitate to integrate film into English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) classrooms because of the uncertainty of the educational efficacy of viewing an entire film in class and the motivational value of the repeated use of short film clips. However, both short film clips and longer films can be used in class to motivate ESL students and enhance their listening and speaking skills. This paper explains why the combined use of abridged feature films and short film clips is more motivational and effective for second language learners and equally attractive to management-minded teachers. It notes that the use of a combination of feature length films and film clips in class is beneficial for several reasons, such as the large amount of exposure to language that students receive via feature films, students' ability to participate in other in-class exercises when using short film clips, and the use of films in emergency situations when the teacher is out. This paper presents various film activities and provides practical guidelines for editing film materials, looking at the technology available for creating film-based teaching materials. (SM)

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Motivational and Effective Film Activities For the Language Lab Class

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ABSTRACT

A hesitation exists regarding the integration of film into the EFL classroom as an instructional aid—an uncertainty due in part to doubts about the educational efficacy of viewing an entire film in the classroom setting and the motivational value of the repeated use of short film clips. This workshop speaks to both of these anxieties by demonstrating how short film clips and longer cinematic materials can be used in a classroom setting to motivate students and more rapidly enhance their listening and speaking skills. This presentation starts off by explaining why the combined use of *abridged films* (feature-length films that have been edited into 70 to 80 minutes) and *film clips* (2 to 3 minutes short segments excerpted from the whole films) is more motivational and effective for language learners and equally attractive to management-minded teachers. This presentation then provides some practical guidelines for the editing of film materials, including a brief look at the technology available for use in the creation of film-based teaching materials. The practical aim of this workshop is to assist teachers who are seeking more efficient and highly motivating methods that can help students experience both pleasure and a sense of achievement in the English language classroom.

INTRODUCTION

Video use in the language education classroom is on the rise, at least according to the steadily increasing number of articles on the subject finding their way into educators' newsletters and academic journals worldwide. But for many language instructors the use of videotape in the classroom continues to be fraught with uncertainty and guilt. This is especially true for those who use authentic materials gleaned from the entertainment industry. It may never be entirely impossible for even the most open-minded educator to dispel lingering qualms about the academic validity of passive film viewing in the classroom setting, not to mention doubts about the motivational benefits of using shorter segments excerpted from larger film sources. Is it possible that these and other uncertainties are preventing more teachers from taking full advantage of the tremendous source of educative materials available from the entertainment industry?

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This workshop is designed to help allay the fear—or perhaps the *guilt*—inherent in the use of authentic video materials by providing a guideline on how to cull the greatest academic advantages from the use of both abridged feature films and short cinematic clips. These pragmatic suggestions offer the advantage of enhanced student motivation and improved language skills.

Review of the Literature

One of the primary concerns about the use of authentic video materials in the classroom is the question of time. The modern feature-length film rarely clocks in at under one-and-a-half hours, or 90 minutes, except animated films. The typical two-period class session is less than two hours, factoring in a break period. More time is consumed in administrative considerations, such as calling the roll or simply getting students settled. It is no surprise, then, that many advocates of video-based instruction advise the use of short films or excerpted segments. The argument for brevity lies largely in the belief that time is saved for more intensive language practice and oral production. Shorter segments also play well with the modern television generation's short attention span: "Better to use a short segment of video thoroughly and systematically rather than to play a long sequence, which is likely to result in less active viewing on the part of your student (Stempleski and Tomalin 1990). This argument seems to suggest that longer viewing sessions result in greater intellectual passivity and wasted time. The viewing of an entire film should be done at home or in the university multimedia center, not during the class session (Katchen 1996). The use of a full film in the classroom is recommended only in the most dire of circumstances, when the video fulfills the role of substitute or stand-in for a teacher who is suddenly and unexpectedly forced out of the classroom by illness or emergency (Katchen 1999).

The use of excerpted segments gleaned from a larger work is an alternative that many teachers justify as the incorporation of extra-textual materials that are motivational and enjoyable, as well as economical in the provision of time for other activities (Chiang 1997). This suggested reliance upon film clips is not without critics, however. A major criticism of this approach is that authentic films are meant to be experienced in their entirety, and the shattering of this special cinematic encounter is tantamount to psychic violence and destroys the motivational value inherent in films. Segmentation prevents the film from working its magic and drawing the viewer-student into an emotional realm that can prove so valuable to the overall goal of educating young adults (Shea 1999). This is not to suggest that teachers have the right to abandon discrimination and effort. No film should be presented without laying the appropriate groundwork (Shea 1999). Students who enter the extended

viewing experience after a period of careful and sufficient preparation are exposing themselves to "mass quantities" of comprehensible input (Krashen, 1982, cited by Shea). They are also ready to recognize the "emotional and narrative dynamic of the video as a story about important things in human experience, aesthetic and ethical things like dreams, imaginations, and commitment; things that drive language and ultimately stimulate students to learn it in the first place" (Shea 1999). Such an emotional interaction with the film simply cannot happen through a five-minute clip.

A Pedagogical Compromise

The supporters and detractors of film use have seemingly strong and valid supporting arguments to justify their positions. This ongoing struggle for pedagogical predominance has been immune to calls for compromise, an academic shortsightedness that may have dulled the luster of video-based teaching. The compromise solution offered in this workshop will enables instructors to successfully use both lengthy and shortened film presentations to attain academic and motivational goals.

My experience with video in the classroom began in 1990 with the presentation of feature-length films, an activity that was most typically accepted as a break from the routine and stress of the language classroom. It was not until a few years later that I began to experiment with film-showings, breaking the viewing experience with writing assignments or comprehension checks. By 1997 I had become convinced of the academic value inherent in the classroom use of both longer and shorter viewing activities, with an added concentration on abridged film formats. Explained simply for the purpose of this workshop, "abridged films" are feature-length commercial films that have been edited down to 70 to 80 minutes , a time frame that enables them to be presented in a single weekly class session for some special occasions mentioned in the next paragraph. Or, it can be finished in two class sessions, each time viewing half of it and leaving plenty of time for relevant activities before my students forgot what they have watched. Mostly, I take the latter arrangement for my abridged film activities except sometimes I need to take a leave under some situations.

I also recognized great potential in the use of film clips, which are brief sections of action or dialogue that have been removed from the longer film while retaining (or through the act of excerption *creating*) their own plot-line integrity. The combined use of both abridged films and excerpts, in combination with other carefully planned classroom activities, resulted in academic effectiveness and motivational enhancement. The success arises from a number of factors:

Quantity Time. The viewing of the abridged films can give students a large quantity of exposures to the comprehensive input (Krashen 1987). Since most of my

students are not English major Freshmen or Sophomores (only 1 to 3 English majors at most in my class every academic year); the level of their listening and speaking ranges from low to low-intermediate, and usually they don't spend extra time on improving their listening and speaking skills. Hopefully, the quantity of time of viewing of the abridged films can add their exposures to the chances of input, and they can transfer the skills picked up in the classroom to their viewing experiences outside the classroom.

Salvage Time. The use of film clips enables students to partake of other in-class exercises that provide them a more complete and systematic education in the different aspects of language production. More time is also available for intensive listening comprehension, oral production and cultural awareness activities.

Down Time. Illness and emergencies are the bane of every educator. Office workers can phone in sick without causing too much crisis, but a teacher's absence has an immediate and direct effect upon dozens of lives. The announcement of class cancellation may initially be met with cheers, but the joy will quickly become irritation when students realize the hassles of having to re-schedule the class. Nor are students particularly comfortable watching an instructor suffer from a bad headcold and all the accompanying symptoms. Students are equally cheerless when left sitting and twiddling their thumbs when their instructor is suddenly called out of the classroom to attend to a department emergency. In all these situations, the abridged film can become a teacher's ally by keeping them focused on the task of language learning despite their instructor's emotional or physical absence.

Inspired Time. One of the most common complaints offered by teachers who use video resources is that materials preparation is too time-consuming. At least that is the opinion of almost 49 percent of teachers from seven universities throughout Taiwan who responded to a survey I conducted in 1999. This is an undeniable reality that cannot be avoided. However, teachers can find career-enhancing motivation through the experience of providing a "full" film in a single showing and using clips taken from that same film to emphasize various authentic aspects of the target language in all its dialogic variety. Given the high risk of burnout in the teaching field, it is always important for instructors to avoid routine and open themselves up to positive and rewarding teaching experiences.

Educated Time. Informal student surveys reveal that sometimes less is more; other time more is less. The use of film excerpts, in connection with a full viewing of the film, has often garnered great approval from those who take their learning seriously. Likewise, students have noted that in some situations, more is less. A number of complaints arise from the showing of a feature-length film in the classroom, an experience that some say is discouraging simply because of a desire to fully focus

on the linguistic aspects of the spoken dialogue, but an inability to do so. Others express dissatisfaction from the occasional experience of watching an entire film, only to have the final few minutes of the film fast-forwarded toward a conclusion in order to beat the bell. The use of film excerpts and abridged films speaks to both of these complaints, as well as helping to avoid the embarrassment of exposing students to questionable cinematic moments of excessive or unnecessary nudity, profanity, gore or violence.

VARIOUS ACTIVITIES

What follows is a look at how instructors can use both abridged films and excerpts to help students attain the dual goals of language enhancement and motivation.

Abridged Films

As noted earlier, the term "abridged film" refers to the film that has been edited down into a time frame that enables a single viewing within the time limits of a single class session or two classes viewing for leaving plenty of time for related activities. It is the teacher who does the editing, leaving her the ultimate choice in what is cut and what remains. The most important consideration is the original plot integrity of the film. An amazing amount of time can be shaved off a film through the removal of vista shots used for scene changes, or the removal of montage sequences that serve only to emphasize a previously established conflict. Of course, scenes of impropriety can likewise be removed as long as their absence does not threaten the understanding or appreciation of the plot.

The following activities can be used to enhance the experience of viewing an abridged film, and some also can be used in the film clip activities. If edited well, the abridged film will give the same emotional power as an unedited product. A colleague's editing of the science fiction thriller *Gattaca* is an example of how this can be achieved. In order to meet the 100-minute restriction of a typical language laboratory class session, the instructor shave off approximately 20 minutes of action from the film. This time was found by removing much of the opening credits, three short dialogues, a bedroom scene, and a brief action segment. Of the three dialogues, two were revealed in later scenes or dialogues, while the third was mostly small talk that—in the teacher's mind—served only to slow the pace of the film, rather than enhance it. The removal of the love scene certainly changed the perception of a character's motivation, but it did not negatively harm the overall plot and may actually have heightened the film's message about goodwill. If handled well, students may not even notice that portions of the film have been removed.

Pre-Viewing Handouts

As many instructors can testify, Asian students feel more secure when they have textual support. The printed handout is a familiar safety net for most learners, especially those who are ambitious enough to study their handouts prior to the actual film-viewing experience. It should be noted, however, that too many handouts can be as terrifying as none at all. With too many pages of transcripts, students may feel as if they are under tremendous pressure. The perfect handouts are limited to within 10 pages, with words chosen for their relative simplicity and ease of use. There are a variety of approaches that can be taken in regard to the purpose and style of handout materials distributed to students.

Vocabulary Lists. Prior to the actual viewing, you can distribute a variety of film-related handouts. These may include important vocabulary words, idioms or sentences that your students may later be tested on. Students may also be told that a future quiz will be developed, half of which will represent words on the handout, and the other half offered to evaluate students' overall comprehension of the film. This encourages students to do some preparation in advance to facilitate their later viewing and keeps them from dozing off or losing concentration for long period of viewing. I have experimented this way for many years, and my students feel it is an efficient way to help them learn more actively.

The Transcript. Students may be given transcripts from various important sections of the film, and told to translate these into Chinese. They can at a later point compare their translation with those offered on-screen by the professional translators. If the exact meanings for some expressions are impossible to pin down, students can be encouraged to concentrate during the actual viewing in order to see a more accurate translation.

Production Notes. Background information on the primary actors' personal and professional backgrounds is useful in helping students forge some degree of identification with the celebrities. Handouts and background production information can likewise serve to establish an emotional connection with the fictional characters and conflicts portrayed in the film. For example, before showing students film, *Forrest Gump*, I shared with students an article about Tom Hanks' personal background. Most students were amazed to discover how Hanks become a successful and optimistic actor after having experienced a very troubling childhood. Students were then more motivated, and actually expressed an increased interest in seeing the film.

Comprehension Guides. Once a while, you can try to give students a list of questions and topics for them to focus while viewing the film. It works better when you give the questions one week before the class session. If class time allows, you

also can give this handout 15 minutes before the viewing and tell students that you will at some point in the class evaluate them in terms of their oral performance according to the questions in the handouts. Sometimes, it is necessary to give students some extra pressure in order to prevent them from lapsing into an excessively passive mode of viewing.

Tips on Handouts. All the handouts or worksheets mentioned here are designed to help students' listening and speaking communicative skills. And they also help to keep students awake as well! As far as their value in enhancing language learning, it is best if handouts be distributed a week prior to the actual viewing. It is also best not to give more than one type of handout at a time, and to avoid churning out an excessive workload for already overburdened students.

In-Viewing Activities

There are some valuable tasks that students can do during the actual viewing of the abridged film. These do not necessarily detract from the emotional authority of the viewing activity, and enhance the academic efficacy of film-viewing as an in-class activity.

Jotting Down Items. Students can be asked to jot down as many dialogue items as they can during the viewing experience. When they first try this method, they might feel it is too difficult to view the film and take notes at the same time. My classroom experience verifies this, but I also forced students to recognize that their reluctance was simply a result of a self-defeating attitude. At the start of this exercise, students could only write an average of 30 to 40 items for vocabulary, phrases or sentences. With practice and added confidence, they increased their note-taking ability to an average of 40 to 60 items per film, with some topping out at 110 words or phrases.

Nevertheless, some individuals still ended the semester complaining that this task gave them too much pressure while viewing, leading me to change my strategy and allow a totally passive viewing followed by a homework assignment summarizing the film and any other things that were learned from the experience. When I went through their assignments, I found most students wrote only a few lines of summarization (six to nine lines), with only a handful giving more than 10 lines of text. Students admitted they didn't know how to summarize the story because of their limited vocabularies and poor writing skills, and that a week later they had already almost forgotten the film. An informal survey aimed at investigating this disturbing phenomenon revealed, to my surprise, that approximately 86 percent of student respondents expressed a preference for taking notes during the film viewing rather than writing a summary afterwards.

They noted that this enabled them to pay more attention to the content of the film,

thereby improving their listening comprehension, even though they missed part of the content while writing down the dialogues. One student commented, "This class is for improving our English; we don't expect it would be like in the movie theatre just for enjoyment and relaxation." Another echoed, "After this type of challenge and 'torture,' I found that I really could comprehend the spoken dialogues more, not always depending on the Chinese subtitles; it's such an thrilling experience."

Dual Textual Support. It is recommended by my students to put both English and Chinese subtitles on the screen while viewing the abridged films according to two of my surveys, each more than 85 percent of students (236 individuals in 1998 academic year and 175 students in 1999 academic year) thought this format was most helpful, effective and motivational in comparison to viewing films with only Chinese subtitles, English closed captions or no on-screen textual support at all. They expressed that the first appearance of Chinese subtitles on the screen can give them a short moment to take a quick look at it and help them to get the general meaning of the upcoming English subtitles and spoken dialogues. Not like viewing films with only English closed captions, it lead to too much attention in reading the words, causing a deficiency in aural skills because of their slow speed of reading English subtitles. They said that the abridged films without any subtitles are simply out the question for them to view over twenty minutes without getting lost in it.

Teacher's Support. Surprising as it may seem, students respond well to having a teacher orally repeat or recite some short dialogue as the film is in progress. Most students report that this "real-time" approach helps their listening comprehension and vocabulary acquisition, and builds confidence in their ability to follow what they think are exchanges delivered at excessively rapid rates. For most non-English majors, the normal speed of spoken language in the average film is simply too fast. Students appreciate the familiarity of their instructor's spoken support, and do not feel disrupted by the instructor's repeating aloud some items. I also observed students doing the same, repeating their teacher's spoken notes.

The Ultimate Flattery. Encourage students to continually mimic the cinematic utterances, encouraging them to imitate both the intonation and body movements of favorite characters in the film. At first, most learners might feel timid about trying this strategy, but after my demonstration, they experimented with it little by little and found it to be a fun way to learn. A good example of what can result from this is the student who adopted the spoken and physical mannerisms used by Italian actor Giancarlo Giannini in his portrayal of the stubborn paternal figure of Alberto Aragon in the film *A Walk in the Clouds*.

Guessing Games. When the film is built upon an element of suspense or mystery, it is sometimes fun to stop at the certain crucial point in the viewing and ask students

to predict the final outcome of the story. This method not only provides a needed break, but also encourages the development of imaginations and enhances creative story telling skills.

Post-Viewing Activities

According to the type of pre-viewing assignments given to students, some post-viewing activities can also be of great value. If the pre-viewing assignment is a list of items, a quiz can be held after finishing the viewing. If some questions about the film are distributed to the students before the viewing, the discussion of these can follow. A debate over the controversial issues can develop students' critical thinking and communicative skills as well. There are other effective and reinforcing post-viewing activities available, such as role plays or letters written to various characters in the films.

Film Excerpts

There are plenty of resources and literature about how to use the video segment. Here, I only mention about some activities that have been successfully implemented in my classes. The typical excerpt used in these classes was no longer than three minutes in length, with the occasional excerpt of up to 20 minutes. The key to a successful excerpt is the selection of a brief dialogue or action sequence that is understandable despite its removal from the larger tale. As always, instructors should aim for a segment of dialogue that is neither too difficult nor too simple.

Pre-Viewing Activities

These exercises, which are built upon the use of film excerpts, can take place prior to the actual viewing of a abridged film.

Varied Textual Supports. If possible, try to show film clips with three different subtitle formats (as noted above). The order, type or frequency of subtitles shown on the screen depends on the students' level, preference—and sometimes just for the thrill of diversity. Additional textual support can be provided in the form of a printed handout provided at any point before, after or during repeated viewings of a film excerpt. Let students experience various ways of viewing. It may help if you explain your approach at the start of the class and try to avoid making students feel confused about what is expected of them in the class.

Cloze Transcripts. You can give students transcripts that have blanks for them to fill in. An alternative would be to break the class into two halves, with each side working on a portion of the transcript to create the cloze-format handout for their classmates. This gives an element of student-centeredness to the class activity, allowing students to check each other's progress in a spirit of camaraderie.

In-Viewing Activities

Although film excerpts are brief, there is still enough time for students to keep themselves busy and learning with a few activities.

Worksheets. Students report actual advances in learning, as well as great pleasure, in the challenge of making their own worksheets during the viewing of brief film excerpts. Working as individuals, they can then pair up with a partner for the purpose of quizzing each other on what they just witnessed in the film excerpt. Alternatively, the instructor could provide a set of worksheets to be filled in during the viewing, with the focus on plot comprehension.

Repeated Viewing. Students can be challenged with repeated viewings of the excerpt using increasingly difficult levels of subtitling. In other words, a first viewing can contain Chinese subtitles only, second viewing with only the English closed captions, and the third viewing having no subtitles at all. This enables them to gradually move their attention from simple plot understanding toward full aural comprehension.

Instant Imitation. The repetition or imitation of characters and cinematic dialogues forces students to pay closer attention to factors such as rhythm, pronunciation or intonation.

Post-viewing Activities

When the lights come on after the excerpt ends, students are usually ready to begin work on a variety of enjoyable exercises.

Role Plays. Everybody loves being the center of attention, and students are no different. Short film excerpts offer a basis upon which students can build larger role plays. Alternatively, students can re-enact the scene they just viewed. They can mimic the actors' portrayals or reinterpret the characters and dialogues without losing the original meaning of the context. Students can also change the conflict or creatively reach another solution to the original conflicts presented in the drama.

Controversial Colloquy. If the excerpt raises some controversial issues, it may give rise to group discussions and elicit students' views about these subjects. Students have the opportunity to develop and express their insights into problems related to their experiences or to show concerns about the crises they face every day.

The Unsaid. There are still a great number of activities that are not making mention in this workshop, although many of these can be found in the library of already published materials. Most important in this workshop format is the sharing of ideas that takes place among those who are eager to develop more strategies to do reinforcement for the learning effects.

GUIDELINES FOR EDITING

What follows are some suggestions on how the to make videotape materials, and some guidelines on what electronic equipment can be used to set up a home-editing laboratory that is both affordable and easy to use.

Abridged Films

1. When a teacher is going to edit the whole film into an abridged version, she needs to watch the film at least twice, and write down the notes during the viewing in order to decide which scenes should be cut out, and to control the length of this condensed version.

2. It is advisable to keep the length of abridged film to within the limits of your class time. Try also to give yourself at least 10 minutes for calling roll or other administrative matters. You may also need to set aside ample time for pre-viewing or post-viewing activities.

3. It is better to use both English and Chinese subtitles simultaneously, as these increase comprehension which in turn enhances motivation.

Film Excerpts

1. If the clip is offered for purposes of improving listening comprehension, it is best to select an action sequence with no more than two speakers. The length of each utterance should be balanced, avoiding monologues or soliloquies.

2. The clarity of each utterance is very important. Pay careful attention to the speaker's pronunciation, accent, pacing and intonation. Also consider the quality of reproduction, as repeated copying will diminish the sound (and visual) quality of your videotape. And be aware of the classroom playback system, giving yourself time before class to check the sound levels of the system.

3. Keep the length of clip as short as possible to enable time for repeated viewing and reinforcement activities. The best length is typically under three minutes, which is short enough to provide enough memorable dialogue. It is also good to select sections of dialogue that can be practiced by a number of individuals without too much class time taken.

EQUIPMENT NEEDS

The most basic home-editing setup can include both laser and video technology, as well as computer links and audio-tape additions. Videotape materials can be produced using a laser disc (LD) player, a Closed Caption Decoder, two video cassette recorders, a DOS-system computer program, a computer interface, and other playback technologies such as the DVD (and an accompanying DVD Decoder).

CONCLUSION

The suggested activities for the combined use of the abridged films and film clips mentioned in this paper mostly aimed at those students whose non-English majors with low to intermediate level of listening and speaking proficiency. And the activities are designed to fit in three(at least two) weeks class sessions for each film. For those students whose levels are higher than that, the teacher might need to modify the use of different activities, especially the arrangement of different subtitles. For the teacher who plans to have only a week to design the activities for one film, it is impossible to put both abridged film and film clips activities into the schedule. You need to decide to use either of two types according to the purpose of your implementing films in your syllabus. Besides, the teacher need to own or the language center need to provide the related set of equipment for producing the different subtitles and transcripts, otherwise, some editing works can not be done. Furthermore, the classroom setting needs modern laboratory setting with dim light design in order to let students jot down notes while viewing. Without these technological supports, the activities might need to be modified. It's advisable for the teacher to use less films in a semester rather more films leaving less time for activities. In doing this, the film activities can be presented more systematically and completely.

All the statements made in this paper is only my own empirical experience and observation in my classroom, as well as the opinions brought up by my students or from several questionnaire surveys in the EFL classroom for the last few years. Therefore, it doesn't guarantee to fit in other classrooms like ESL classroom, or other level subjects. The further research with more advanced students might result in quite different findings. And the empirical experiments for the comparison of different subtitles and various viewing skills might be needed to ensure the film-teaching more powerfully and effectively.

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